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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – February 19th, 2014**

**In Support of S.B. 70 - AAC THE PRESERVATION OF LANDS UNDER THE
CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to express our support for S.B. 70 which would provide stronger protections for State Parks and Forest lands.

The DEEP has been highly selective in choosing the lands it has acquired under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust program. A large majority of properties submitted to or considered by the agency for purchase were rejected just in preliminary reviews. Those advancing in the acquisition process were subjected to a very sophisticated ranking system, which eliminated many additional parcels. The lands which have been ultimately acquired were the very most critical for the various purposes enumerated in the statutes for the program, which were available on the market at any given time.

The acquisition of many of these lands was assisted by financial contributions from partners such as The Nature Conservancy and other groups, by the assistance of many groups and individuals in establishing relationships and negotiating with landowners, and by the political support of local officials and activists.

Many of these parties were mistaken in believing that these lands would be under the strongest possible protection once acquired by the state. We urge the General Assembly to correct the gaps in the statute that make this very understandable perception on the part of these parties a misconception.

Properties that are acquired under a program whose statutory purpose is *“to acquire land that represents the ecological diversity of Connecticut, including natural features such as riverine, montane, coastal and geologic systems or other natural areas, on behalf of the state, **in order to ensure the preservation and conservation of such land for recreational, scientific, educational, cultural and aesthetic purposes,** (2) acquire land of unusual natural interest as additions to the system of parks, forests, wildlife and fishery management areas, natural areas and dedicated natural area preserves in the state for the beneficial use and enjoyment of the public, [and] (3) acquire land identified as essential habitat for endangered and threatened species”* should be accorded much stronger protections than they currently have.

S.B. 70 contains a very sensible and flexible approach to truly ensure “the preservation and conservation of such land.”